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ABSTRACT

Classical Greek is taught as an elective to over 200 students in seven secondary schools of the School District of Philadelphia. In the past decade the restoration of Greek studies to the classical curriculum was called for, and in 1968 a Greek Curriculum Committee was established in Philadelphia to develop a program and instructional materials. Because most extant Greek texts were aimed at college students and utilized the traditional grammar-translation approach, the committee developed its own materials based on the following principles: (1) Greek civilization, literature, history and culture should relate to the students' experience. The Hellenic effect on art, architecture, government, law, medicine and literature should be emphasized. (2) The course should be an instrument of general education of value to students of all backgrounds and abilities, as an end in itself. Instruction should be lively and dramatic. (3) Direct method and aural-oral teaching should be employed. (4) English vocabulary building through Greek stems should be stressed. Levels Alpha and Beta of the course, entitled "The Ancient Greeks Speak to Us," have been completed so far. Locally developed materials include teachers' guides, programed texts, tapes and visual cue cards. Certain commercially available aids are also used. (CHK)

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THE CLASSICAL GREEK PROGRAM IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

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Classical Greek, using innovative curriculum materials is now being taught as an elective open to all interested students in 7 secondary schools of the School District of Philadelphia. At present over 200 urban pupils of all backgrounds and abilities are enrolled in the program and the program is staffed by itinerant Latin teachers who are also qualified in Greek. Plans are being made to expand the program as resources and interest permit. In two of the 7 schools Greek is a major subject meeting daily on full parity with other foreign languages. In the other schools it is a minor subject meeting 2 or 3 times per week.

A few words about the genesis of the program perhaps are in order. In addressing an audience of foreign language educators it seems superfluous to argue in favor of the desirability of Greek in the public schools. This subject area holds great potential in widening the cultural and linguistic horizons of pupils. The mandate of the Airlie Conference for the restoration of the Greek component of the classical tradition in our educational system as well as the growing call for the inclusion of "uncommon" languages in the curriculum of the schools both gave impetus to the initiation of a Greek program in the Philadelphia Schools. In the late sixties several Latin teachers in the School District expressed the hope that Greek could be made part of the curriculum, and in 1968 Dr. Eleanor L. Sandstrom, Director of Foreign Language Education for the School District, announced the formation of a Greek Curriculum Committee to examine and develop instructional materials that might be used in a Greek program.

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This ongoing Greek Curriculum Committee-which I am privileged to chair-consists of both school and college teachers and persons from inside and outside the school system.

It was obvious, that if our plans for Classical Greek in the city public schools were to succeed, innovative instructional materials were a sine qua non. Most of the textbooks commercially available for teaching Greek are clearly aimed at college students or perhaps at supercerebral prep-school students. Most are very traditional grammar-translation approaches to the Greek language and take little or no cognizance of the exciting new developments in foreign-language instruction in recent years. Most seem to presuppose a well motivated and meticulously diligent student. It is patent that most of the authors have had no experience whatsoever in teaching the young people of the inner city public schools and no acquaintance with the problems of these young people.

Because of the paucity of suitable instructional materials our Greek Curriculum Committee decided to develop its own materials keeping in mind the following basic principles:

1. In the course Greek civilization, literature, history and culture should be related to the lives and experience of the students. It is most important that students be made aware of the influence of the Hellenic heritage on our own world in such areas as art, architecture, government, law, medicine, religion, mythology, and literature. The experiences of the classical past should be used to shed light on our own experiences. The classical past should be compared and contrasted with the present.
2. The course should be geared to meet the needs of all secondary school students. Greek should be viewed as a broad instrument of general educatio of great cultural and linguistic value to students of every range of background and ability.

The Greek course should be worthwhile and complete in and of itself, and the course should not be regarded primarily as a preparation for future work in Greek. Instruction geared to meet the needs of all pupils must be lively, dramatic, enthusiastic, and multisensory.

3. The principles of structural linguistics and the direct method of language teaching should be used, and the approach to Greek should be aural-oral. In practical terms this means:

   a. Lexical items should be presented in context.

   b. Pattern practices should be employed in the teaching of structure.

   c. Comprehension should be checked via Greek questions to be answered in Greek or Greek-Greek manipulative type exercises.

   d. Oral practice should precede reading of Greek utterances.

4. Emphasis should be given to building the English vocabulary of pupils through a study of Greek roots, prefixes, and suffixes that occur in English.

We call our Greek course Οἱ Ἕλληνες ἡμῖν λέγουσιν The Ancient Greeks Speak to Us. Thus far Levels Alpha and Beta have appeared.

The locally developed components of the course include teachers guides, a student programmed texts, tapes to accompany the programmed text and supplementary tapes, and visual cue cards for eliciting from the pupils of the Greek quotations around which some of the course is structure. Each teacher receives an instructional kit that includes the locally developed materials as well as certain commercially available materials included to help make the approach multisensory. The commercially available materials include the Britannica Corporation's Historical Reconstructions of Ancient Greece, a collection of filmstrips, and bulletin board pictures.

In some respects our Greek course resembles the Britannica Corporation's Latin instructional system Artes Latinae. Like Artes our Greek course uses programmed learning materials, sententiae or quotations, oral work, structural linguistics, and multimedia.

Each unit in our Greek course has a cultural theme. Examples of unit titles are: The Geography of the Greek World, Everyday Life among the Greeks, the Alphabet, Ancient Crete, Troy, Greek Gods and Heroes, Athens, Sparta, the Struggle with Persia, and the Golden Age. In each unit typically there are the following elements: quotations from the range of Greek literature pertaining to the cultural theme of the unit, selections from pertinent Greek literature given in both English and Greek, cultural background on the theme of the unit, Greek dialogue and pattern practice related to the theme of the unit, explanation of structure, and material on English derivatives and cognates related to Greek lexical items presented, and songs in the target language. In the teachers' guides we suggest what may be taught in each period or lesson and how to teach it. Appendices contain suggestions for extramural or enrichment work and bibliography.

Pupils have thus far been very enthusiastic about the program. Despite crowded secondary school schedules and diminishing general interest in foreign language study nationally enrollment in the Greek program has increased after a very modest beginning.

Teachers of Greek and central divisional staff have made informal assessments and evaluation of the program. To date their evaluations have been very positive. We hope to make a more formal research evaluation of the program when resources permit. The attitude of local and central office administration toward the program has likewise been positive generally - in part, I think, because our curricular approach to Greek has been innovative and gives real promise of helping to meet the educational needs of urban pupils.

We see the Greek program as one important aspect of our commitment to the view that classical languages - when innovatively and creatively taught - hold unique values in the education of urban pupils.